

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
U.S. EXTENSION SERVICE  
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3 YOUR COUNTY EXTENSION AGENTS 1/

By M. L. Wilson  
Director of Extension Work

You probably know your county extension agents very well. But do you know that they are a part of a great rural movement which means better homes, better farms, better organized communities, and better informed rural citizens? Do you know that they have at their beck and call a great reservoir of scientific and tested research in agriculture and home economics which they can adapt to the problems of your county? Do you know that last year county governing bodies appropriated about 14 million dollars for extension work. State legislatures spent about 19 million dollars. The Federal Congress through the U. S. Department of Agriculture added about 30 million dollars. Farm organizations and other local sources accounted for about 2 million dollars.

Folks who have watched county extension workers get around over their counties for the last 35 years might argue just a little bit as to whether jet propulsion is something new. And even though they might concede that these agents don't have jet engines in their cars they'll still say that they cover a lot of territory in a hurry.

There's only a few more than 9,000 of these agents in the United States and its three territories. But they're carrying on an educational program that reaches a majority of the farm families in the country and they are reaching a lot of non-farm folks, too.

Extension agents are local folks who live among the people they advise and help. Back of them are the full resources of the State Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations and the United States Department of Agriculture.

These extension agents are charged with the responsibility "to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics, and to encourage application of the same." That's the wording of the Federal law that set up the Cooperative Extension Service in 1914 and provided for agreements with States and counties to carry on a joint effort. However, the action of Congress at that time was a reflection of an active people's movement in rural areas, for farm people were beginning to awaken to the value of better farming and homemaking practices. For the decade prior to 1914 extension agents were being appointed. And so, Congress enacted the Smith-Lever Act which made a national cooperative endeavor of an already snow-balling movement.

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Extension work is, as I say, a cooperative program, cooperative among the United States Department of Agriculture, the State land-grant college, and the counties. The program is cooperatively planned and financed with major program determination and supervision resting in the counties and State co-operative extension office.

There's a wide variation in the number of workers in the various counties. There are county agricultural agents in nearly 3,000 counties. A few counties have only a county agricultural agent. Home demonstration agents are employed in over three-fourths of the counties. In counties with heavy population there may be several assistant agents. In some of the States 4-H club work with boys and girls is carried on by special county 4-H agents, while in the others the agricultural and home demonstration agents and their assistants also lead the work with young people.

Negro agents are employed in 355 counties in the Southern States where there is heavy negro farm population. They give special assistance to Negro farmers in addition to that given by the white agents.

In the State extension office there are subject matter specialists in livestock, crops, clothing, health, poultry, insects, disease and other specialized fields. They work closely with the experiment stations, help keep the agents informed on research results and are on hand to help the agents with urgent technical problems.

These State specialists and others in the State extension office get similar help from a small staff of Federal extension workers in the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

All of these forces, county, State and Federal, provide a way through which farm people can get the latest results of research, and information about the farm situation, farm programs and the outlook for various crops and livestock; get it in simplified, localized form often demonstrated in their own communities.

The whole program is one of helping people to help themselves. The key is participation and self-expression. People grow as they develop initiative and share responsibility.

The type of program conducted in any county is largely determined by the situations that exist and by what local people think is important. In the United States agriculture is such a varied industry that few recommendations fit everywhere. Even within States many great differences exist in situations.

Homemaking does not have quite as much variation as does agriculture but here, too, there are different problems to be dealt with. So it is difficult to paint an overall picture of the work of Extension agents.

Although the problems may be different there is a uniformity in the educational methods used. Extension workers use such educational methods as demonstrations, meetings, farm and home visits, leader training meetings, telephone calls, letters, press releases, radio programs, distribution of bulletins, and the like.

For the homemaker the topics included nutrition, clothing, house furnishings, family health, child care, home management and family recreation, just to mention a few of the subjects with which Extension workers dealt.

An important part of the Extension program is the work with rural youths. Membership in the nation's 4-H clubs reached the 1,800,000 mark in 1948. About 13 million farm boys and girls have been members of 4-H clubs. They have taken their place among the leadership of farmers and homemakers of today. The extension agents spend about one-third of their time on work with boys and girls. This work is very similar to the help they give adults, except it is looking to the future; developing boys and girls who know how to do things, developing healthier more useful citizens. The agents help the boys and girls plan their club work and carry out demonstrations and projects in better farming, homemaking and citizenship. They help select and train local people who act as 4-H club leaders.

Publication of 834 thousand news articles and the broadcasting of 105,000 radio talks helped to get information to people. And the distribution of 18,726,000 bulletins and pamphlets prepared by State Colleges and the United States Department of Agriculture provided many families with information they desired.

Of this total budget last year for cooperative extension work of about 65 million dollars, 52 per cent was from State and local sources and 48 per cent from the Federal Government.

About 69 per cent of the 65 million dollars is spent in the county extension offices. The rest is spent in the State office for specialist help, supervision and providing the agents with educational materials. The small Federal extension office is financed out of the U. S. Department of Agriculture budget.

It's impossible to measure the return from the expenditure of these funds on a dollar and cents basis. Boosting crop yields as a result of Extension work is something that is tangible. Increased livestock income is also fairly easy to measure. Some kind of a figure might be arrived at for a number of other items. But it is impossible to translate into dollars and cents the returns from better living and satisfaction that come from much of Extension's work. Healthier, better fed families can't be valued. Neither can recreation, community cooperation and many of the other intangible benefits from Extension programs.

For those who want some figures on dollar returns examples might be cited from Alabama and Mississippi where work on cotton insect control added 19 million dollars to the income of farmers. One also might cite the work on corn improvement in seven Southern States where the average yield in 1948 was 25 bushels as compared to a 10-year average yield of 16.5 bushels for the 1935-44 period.

In Arkansas \$2,100,000 was saved by 2,696 farm families in the construction of new homes as a result of Extension guidance. And another \$2,700,000 was saved by families who remodeled their homes or built new barns.

Work on fly control added more than 21 million dollars to the income of Iowa farmers by increasing the pounds of beef and milk produced by herds. In the same State farmers who used recommended practices for controlling European corn borers added more than 3 million dollars to their income. Pennsylvania potato growers increased the value of their crop by 2 and one-half million dollars by using DDT to control insects.

County extension agents were largely responsible for conducting the Federal-State grasshopper control programs that saved 67 million dollars worth of crops on 12 million acres of land. In the State of Washington fruit growers who followed extension recommendations for the control of codling moths in apple orchards increased their income by \$7,600,000.

Not to neglect the homemaking side of Extension work it should be pointed out that more than 326 million quarts of food were canned in 1948 by families who received information on nutrition and food preservation from Extension workers and that in addition 579 million pounds of other food products were preserved in other ways.

Figures are not available on the number of garments made or remodeled by homemakers who followed Extension recommendations nor the number of dollars saved by following buying recommendations. Nor are they available for the guidance given on home furnishings and the many other fields in which Extension helps farm families live better lives.

In recent years there has been an almost world-wide interest in the democratic nature of our cooperative extension system. Representatives from 41 countries came to the United States during the last year to study extension educational methods. Many of them learned from county extension agents first hand, and lived for several weeks on American farms. About 40 of our co-operative extension workers during the year accepted invitations to visit foreign countries to help them start or strengthen similar educational systems with their own people.